

## Relief Society Presidents



E. E. GREENE RICHARDSON



JOHN CLAWSON

### PRESIDENT EMMA HALE SMITH 1842-1844

Emma Hale Smith, the first President of Relief Society, was born in Harmony, Pennsylvania, July 10, 1804. She married the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1827 and became the mother of eight children, four of whom died in infancy or youth. In addition to her own children, she adopted twins, one of whom lived to maturity. From the time of her marriage to the Prophet until his death seventeen years later, June 27, 1844, she shared in the trials and persecutions suffered by the Saints. In July 1830, the word of the Lord was directed to Emma Smith in a revelation given through Joseph Smith the Prophet at Harmony, Pennsylvania, defining her duties and setting forth for her the glorious possibilities of achievement. In this revelation, recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants, Section 25, she was also called "to make a selection of sacred hymns, and it shall be given thee, which is pleasing unto me, to be heard in my Church." When the Relief Society was organized in Nauvoo, March 17, 1842, Emma Smith was made its president. In a day when women had no training nor background in public service, she ably performed all duties of a public nature to which she was called. In the summer of 1842 she journeyed to Quincy, accompanied by Eliza R. Snow and Amanda Smith, to present to Governor Carlin a petition which had been circulated by the newly organized Female Relief Society and signed by its members. This petition prayed for the protection of the Governor in behalf of the Prophet Joseph Smith from illegal suits then pending against him—an action which was greatly appreciated by the Prophet. After the martyrdom of her husband, Emma chose to remain in Nauvoo and later married Major Lewis C. Bidamon. In her old age the mother of the Prophet, Lucy Mack Smith, made her home with this daughter-in-law. Emma Smith died April 30, 1879, in Nauvoo, and is entombed beside her Prophet husband on the sloping bank of the Mississippi River.

### PRESIDENT ELIZA ROXEY SNOW 1866-1887

Eliza R. Snow was born January 21, 1804. From the time of her baptism at the age of thirty-one until the end of her long life in 1887, her foremost concern was that she might do as much as possible to advance the cause of the gospel. All her great abilities as an executive, teacher, organizer, poet, writer, and speaker were devoted to the service of her Church. She became acquainted with the Prophet Joseph Smith in Kirtland, Ohio, and both there and later in Nauvoo, she acted as governess in his home. She fulfilled her obligation as the first secretary of the Relief Society in Nauvoo by safely bringing "A Book of Records" to Great Salt Lake in 1847. President Brigham Young called her, in 1866, to aid the bishops in organizing the Relief Society in every ward and branch of the Church. During the ensuing twenty-one years, as the General President of Relief Society, she faithfully performed this mission with the help of a group of other leading women. In addition to presiding over the Relief Society, Eliza R. Snow stood at the head of the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association and the Primary Association until the year 1880. She was also in charge of the women's work in the Endowment House, superintendent of the Women's Store, and president of the Deseret Hospital. She encouraged the women to support home industry and to make their own apparel and household furnishings. She herself was proficient in handwork, having been taught by her mother to be a skilled needlewoman. As a poetess, she is best remembered as the author of the great hymn "O My Father"; and as a writer, as the author of the life of her beloved brother, Lorenzo Snow. Her imprint in many fields has deepened with the passing years, and in the hearts of the members of Relief Society today, she is enshrined as an early leader who exemplified in her own life those ideals of service, intellectual advancement, and unselfish devotion which are the very foundation of the Society.

Note: The collection of oil paintings of the nine General Presidents, reproduced on pages 12-16 are the property of the General Board, and hang in the General Board room in the Relief Society Building, Salt Lake City.

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## THE JUBILEE OF 1892

In response to the "Letter of Greeting" here reproduced, and in conformity with the instructions contained therein, fitting jubilee celebrations commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the organization of Relief Society were held in the various branches of the Society in all lands on March 17, 1892. The women met together in "joyful yet solemn assembly." The *Woman's Exponent*, March 15, 1892, makes this interesting observation:

To celebrate this occasion on the same day all over the world wherever there are branches of a Society whether large or small is an event of peculiar significance, and one almost unheard of in the annals of history. To be sure there have been great gatherings in different lands when women delegates from other countries have met for some given purpose, but when has a day been set apart and observed in so many cities, towns and countries and on both hemispheres and the islands of the sea? When has there been a universal prayer offered by the women of any society in all lands at once?<sup>30</sup>

The jubilee celebration was indeed a momentous occasion. In Salt Lake City it was held in the Tabernacle, and was largely attended. According to the *Woman's Exponent*, April 1, 1892:

The stands were handsomely ornamented with flowering plants principally Calla and Easter lilies. The large organ was draped with the stars and stripes, the flags extending across and a large oil painting of Joseph the Prophet hung high in the centre, below it an immense key made of the most beautiful flowers, underneath which was the picture life-size of Emma Smith the first President of the Relief Society and on her right a picture of Eliza R. Snow the second President, and on her left that of Zina D. H. Young the present President.<sup>31</sup>

The music was especially fine. Most of the numbers were given by the Tabernacle Choir under the direction of Professor Evan Stephens, with organ accompaniment by Professor Joseph J. Daynes. The jubilee celebration opened appropriately with the singing by the choir of that grand invocation by Eliza R. Snow, "O My Father, Thou That Dwellest," and closed with the rendition, also by the choir "in full voice and strength" of the celebrated English anthem, "Daughter of Zion Awake From Thy Sadness." An appropriate song, composed expressly for the jubilee by Emily H. Woodmansee, was also rendered by the choir, "O Blest Was the Day When the Prophet and Seer."

The program was inspirational, and was climaxed at high noon by a prayer of "praise and thanksgiving to God," offered by President Joseph F. Smith, in the absence of President Wilford Woodruff who was suffering from a severe cold. It concluded with these words:

Bless thou thy handmaidens who have assembled to commemorate this anniversary. May we understand thy will and keep thy commandments. Bless all thy people and the honorable of the earth everywhere. Fill their hearts with thy peace. Give unto us such things as we most need for we desire only such things as shall bring to pass thy purposes upon the earth.<sup>32</sup>

Several addresses were made, including a spiritual and inspiring message by President Zina D. H. Young. Zina Y. Card "read in a very clear and distinct voice the revelation given to Emma Smith, through Joseph the Seer in Harmony, Penn., July 1830, and published in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, wherein Emma Smith is called an Elect Lady."

An historical sketch prepared by Secretary Sarah M. Kimball, taken from the records of the Relief Society, was read by Dr. James E. Talmage.

The *Woman's Exponent*, March 15, 1892 states:

This Society everywhere observes the same uniformity of purpose and practices the same benevolence, extends the same genial sympathy to the needy, the sick and suffering, whether the language spoken is the English, French, German, Hawaiian or whatever tongue is used, or whether the climate in which the sisters reside is hot, or cold, the same influence directs their works and their labors, for they are all partakers of the same Spirit which the Gospel of Jesus Christ brings to all who embrace it with honest hearts and with pure motives. That this Jubilee celebration will more firmly and closely unite the hearts of the sisters there can be no possible doubt.<sup>33</sup>

The same spirit of love and unity that pervades the Relief Society today has been a part of its heritage through the years:

One of the important lessons which this grand Jubilee will possibly teach, or is likely to impress upon all is that of love and union. Love is the great power that will lift mankind to a higher plane, true love, the love that brings out all the best and noblest qualities of the human soul. The love of God and the love of our fellow-men.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup>Vol. 20, No. 17, p. 133.

<sup>31</sup>Vol. 20, No. 18, p. 140.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 143.

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